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## Obituaries

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### Dale Hanmer: 1937–2011

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Dale Hanmer, who died in the UK on 2 March 2011, was an indefatigable recorder of ornithological findings, particularly those based on her ringing work in Malaŵi in the 1970s and 1980s.

Born in South Africa in 1937, Dale trained as a zoologist and was apparently a demon squash player, fencer and showjumper before meeting and marrying her husband, Tony. His employment as an agricultural engineer took them to live on the Sucoma sugar estate in the extremely hot and humid Shire Valley in southern Malaŵi in the 1970s. The back garden of their estate house, backing onto Elephant Marsh, provided an ideal ringing site, particularly for Palearctic migrants. Here, Dale caught the first Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin *Erythropygia galactotes* to be recorded in Malaŵi. More importantly, through continuous ringing efforts she discovered a remarkable degree of wintering / passage site fidelity by Palearctic migrants, an extraordinary phenomenon so far south of the equator. Inevitably these findings were well documented in papers published in *Ostrich*, *Honeyguide*, *Safring News* and elsewhere.

The constant flow of Dale's papers on migrants by no means excluded studies on Afrotropical species. One particularly interesting paper identified the increase in the extent of the second primary wing-notch over successive moults in (Southern) Blue Waxbills *Uraeginthus angolensis*, a strange but consistent phenomenon that serves no obvious purpose.

Changing circumstances led to the need to move on. In 1992 Dale and Tony moved to the

latter's home country, Zimbabwe. Sadly, Tony died soon afterwards but Dale continued to pursue ringing activities around Mutare, firstly in public open spaces, then following up earlier studies on the movement of forest-associated species. Latterly, life became increasingly difficult in Zimbabwe so Dale migrated finally and for the first time to the Northern Hemisphere, to be closer to her daughter Julia and her family in England, where she continued to work on writing up her notes and observations until very recently.

Apart from her own studies, whilst not one to tolerate the self-aggrandisement of some establishment figures, Dale was very supportive of other ornithologists, especially newcomers. She was most aware of the need to keep publishing sightings and recorded data, not least 'for the increase of human knowledge'. New to this region of Africa in the 1980s, this writer found her to be fantastically supportive and recalls the endless stream of neatly typed letters offering detailed advice on ringing, atlas fieldwork and identification—frequently interspersed with efforts to prevent the undesirable attentions of mongooses, dealing with an irate Boomslang *Dispholidus typus*—and inevitably the latest trials and tribulations with domestic staff. All this would be set down with a wonderfully dry sense of humour.

With her passing, African ornithology has lost a remarkable 'worker': Dale Hanmer's greatest legacy is a prolific bibliography that, hopefully, will continue to encourage others to follow her example of 'getting it down in print'.

Bob Medland

### Gérard Morel: 1925–2011

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Gérard Morel was an unusual person who nevertheless had a great influence on an entire generation of African ornithologists. Having arrived in Senegal in 1953, he stayed there for the rest of his professional life, together with his wife Marie-Yvonne, who was also an ornithologist,

until they retired in 1992. Based in the town of Richard Toll in the far north of the country, he made in-depth studies of, on the one hand, the avifauna of the Sahel, extended subsequently to the whole of the Senégambia region, and on the other the ecology and dynamics of grain-eating

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passerines, particularly Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea* and Sudan Golden Sparrow *Passer luteus*. Thus he was the first person to rigorously quantify the abundance and relationships of sedentary and migratory populations, meanwhile creating a remarkable collection of birds, which formed the basis for systematic and precise studies. He generously welcomed numerous research workers who profited from his knowledge in order to complete their own investigations elsewhere in West Africa and to co-sign their results with him. Furthermore, we are grateful to him for the first modern guide to the identification of the birds of West Africa (with William Serle, 1977), the lack of which had been very evident to ornithologists in the region prior to this.

In cooperation with his colleagues working in Nigeria (Bob Sharland, Hilary Fry *et al.*) in 1979 he became a founder member of the West African Ornithological Society (Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest Africain) alongside those organisations already in existence in the east and south of the

continent. He was Vice President, then President of the Society for over 20 years, developing its journal *Malimbus* and participating actively in all of the Pan-African Ornithological Congresses, where he particularly encouraged the presence of native Africans and of Francophones. Times have really changed since then, both in Africa and among bird populations. However, like many African enthusiasts of my generation, I will never forget what I owe him and I would like those of a younger generation to also remember what they owe to forerunners like him, patient, obstinate, but passionate who, in conditions much more difficult than those encountered today, laid the foundations of African ornithology.

*Jean-Marc Thiollay*  
*President of the West African*  
*Ornithological Society*

This is an abridged version in English of an obituary originally prepared by the same author for *Malimbus*.—THE EDITORS.